



WILD Kids



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Arizona Raptors

Raptors are also called birds of prey. Hawks, eagles, falcons, ospreys (fish-eating, hawk-like birds), and vultures are diurnal raptors, meaning they are active by day. Vultures are considered to be raptors even though they are scavengers – they eat dead animals. Owls are nocturnal raptors, meaning they are active at night. Raptors are well

adapted to hunting for prey. They have excellent eyesight and hearing for locating prey, and powerful talons for capturing prey. Prey is swallowed whole or torn into pieces with their sharp, hooked beak. Raptors can be divided into several groups based on body size and silhouette of the body shape in flight.

Buteos



Buteos are medium to large size soaring hawks. They have broad wings and a short tail. Buteos circle high in the sky searching for rodents and other prey. The red-tailed hawk is a common buteo in Arizona. As you might guess, it has a red tail. Its scientific name is *Buteo jamaicensis*. *Buteo* comes from a Latin word which means hawk. *Jamaicensis* refers to the island of Jamaica where the redtail hawk was first described.

The largest true hawk in Arizona, the ferruginous hawk, is a buteo. It has a wingspan of 4 1/2 feet and a white rump patch. Its scientific name is *Buteo regalis*. *Buteo* means hawk, *regalis* means king.

Eagles



Eagles are actually large hawks, but are called eagles due to their large size. They have broad wings and a short, broad tail. Adult bald eagles have white heads and feed mostly on fish they catch or take from ospreys, and on animals hit by cars. The bald eagle's scientific name is *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*. *Haliaeetus* means sea eagle, *leukos* means white, *cephalus* from *kephale*, means head.

The golden eagle eats mostly small mammals. Its scientific name is *Aquila chrysaetos*. *Aquila* means eagle, *chrysea* from *chrysos*, which means golden.

Accipiters



Accipiters are medium to small size hawks. They have short, rounded wings and a long tail that allows them to make sharp, quick turns while flying. Accipiters feed mostly on birds. When hunting, they often fly low, dart swiftly about, and snatch a bird out of the air or off the ground.

The sharp-shinned hawk, an accipiter, is the smallest hawk in Arizona. It is about the size of a pigeon and feeds mostly on sparrow-size birds. Its scientific name is *Accipiter striatus*. In Latin, *accipiter* means hawk. *Striatus* means striped, referring to the rust colored stripes on its underside.

Falcons



Falcons are medium to small birds of prey with pointed wings and long, thin tails. Falcons are fast-flyers and feed on mammals, birds, and insects. Adult peregrine falcons are about the size of a crow, and feed on doves and pigeons. The peregrine falcon's scientific name is *Falco peregrinus*. *Falco* is a Latin word that means bird of prey. *Peregrinus* means wandering or alien.

The smallest falcon in Arizona is the American kestrel. It feeds mostly on insects and its scientific name is *Falco sparverius*. *Sparverius* means sparrow hawk. But the kestrel is not a hawk and only a small part of its diet is sparrows!

(Note: All birds of prey are protected by law and cannot be kept except by special permit.)



Harriers

Harriers are medium size hawks with long wings and tails. Harriers fly low and feed on rodents. The

Northern harrier is the only harrier in Arizona. Its scientific name is *Circus cyaneus*. *Circus* means circle in the air, *cyaneus* means dark blue, referring to the grayish blue cast to its feathers.



Vultures

Vultures are large, broad-winged, soaring scavengers with naked heads. The turkey

vulture has a red head and a good sense of smell. Its scientific name is *Cathartes aura*. *Cathartes* means cleanser or scavenger, *aura* means gold. The California Condor, a large vulture, was recently reintroduced into northern Arizona.



Owls

Owls are mainly nocturnal birds of prey. The great horned owl is a large, low flying owl that preys on rodents, rabbits,

snakes and skunks. Its feathers and nest often smell like skunk. The great horned owl's scientific name is *Bubo virginianus*. *Bubo* comes from a Latin word that means owl. *Virginianus* refers to Virginia where the owl was first collected for study.

The barn owl is a slim owl with long, pointed wings and a white, heart-shaped face. It preys mostly on rodents. Its scientific name is *Tyto alba pratincola*. *Tyto* comes from a Greek word that means owl. *Alba* means white, *prat* comes from a Latin word that means meadow, and *incola* means lives in (barn owls have a habit of living in barn lofts).



Design A Raptor

Create your own raptor using one of the following sets of adaptations below. For example, if you pick #1, you would draw a diurnal raptor with a body shape like an accipiter, that eats snakes, and is gray speckled with a red tail. Remember to include your raptor's habitat:

food, water, and shelter. Give your raptor a common name and a scientific name. (Use Latin words from the text you just read, and some from the list below.) When finished, explain to your classmates how your raptor is adapted to its habitat.

Set # 1

Active –Diurnal
Body – Accipiter
Food – Snakes
Color – Gray speckled,
with red tail

Set # 2

Active –Nocturnal
Body – Buteo
Food – Insects
Color – Brownish-yellow,
with black head

Set # 3

Active –Diurnal
Body – Falcon
Food – Fish
Color – Black, with
short tail

Set # 4

Active –Nocturnal
Body – Eagle
Food – Doves
Color – Brown, with
long legs

Latin and Greek words & roots

acutus – sharp
albus – white
brachys – short
caput – head
caudatus – tailed
cilla – tail
columbarius – pertaining to doves
dichroma – 2-colored
fuscus – brown
grallitores – long legs
griseus – gray
gularis – throat

lagopus – furry, like a rabbit's foot
lentiginosus – speckled
lineatus – striped
luteus – yellow
nebulosa – dark
nigricans – black
nitidus – shining, bright
nykteros – nocturnal
onux – talon
oura – tail
penna – wing
pes – foot

platys – broad
poikilos – spotted
pteron – wing
rostrum – beak
ruber – red
rusticolo – living in the country
sociabilis – sociable
streperus – noisy
strix – owl
trichopsis – hairy faced
tyrannus – ruler
uncinctus – hooked (beak)